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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3392  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6762  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4493  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3115  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7639  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1712  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5048  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1255  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//  
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7380

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000406

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Djibouti, Syria/Vietnam, Syria/Italy, Iraq,  
Palestinian Refugees, Arab Media Role, Lebanon, Russia (4/27-29)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Apr. 27 reported that President Asad received a letter from the President of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Ghaila, connected with bilateral relations, regional developments and developments in the Horn of African. The letter was conveyed by Djibouti Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mahmoud Ali Yousuf, during his meeting with President Asad on Apr.

¶26. Talks focused on current and bilateral relations. On Syrian-Vietnamese relations, papers reported the visit to Vietnam by a Syrian delegation headed by Assistant Foreign Minister Ahmad Arnous to convey a message from President Asad to the President of Vietnam, Nguyen Minh. The letter was handed to Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Vietnam, Pham Gia Khiem, on Apr. 26. The letter dealt with developments in the region and means of developing bilateral relations.

Papers also reported that FM Mouallem received two phone calls on Apr. 27, from Iraqi FM Hoshiyar Zebari and Turkish FM Abdullah Gul, on ongoing preparations for the meeting of Iraq's neighboring countries scheduled to be held with the participation of the five permanent members at the security council and the G-8 nations in Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt.

On Apr. 29 papers featured a speech by the Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, Oliviero Diliberto, at the opening of the 4th conference of the party in Rimini on Apr. 28. In the speech, he reiterated the importance of Syria's influential role in achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the importance of openness and dialogue with Syria. He criticized practices of the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people, recalling the statement of the late Pope John Paul II that "the holy lands are in need of bridges and not apartheid walls." Diliberto condemned the US war on Iraq, stressing that "it has contributed to an increase in terrorism, injustice and poverty and damaged the world as a whole."

All dailies on Apr. 29 reported that over 500 rehabilitated residential housing units were handed over to Palestinian refugees in Khan Dannoun Camp near Damascus as a result of cooperation between Syria and the European Commission Program for Humanitarian Aid, and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, UNRWA. The hand-over took place in the presence of Information Minister Mohsen Bilal, who said that the real solution to all the

problems in the region is the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace based UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. He called on the European Union to reactivate its role to achieve peace in the region.

Information Minister Moshen Bilal renewed Syria's commitment to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with relevant international resolutions, the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative. "Syria is committed to her rights and supports all just Arab causes," the Minister underlined in an interview with the Lebanese weekly Ashams (the Sun) published Apr. 27. Bilal stressed the need for the Arab and Islamic mass media to consider themselves part of the confrontation with Israel and to put the Palestinian conflict with Israel among their top priorities. Bilal said the forthcoming "International Conference on Arab-Islamic Media in Support of Palestinians," that will be held under the patronage of President Asad in Damascus April 30 - May 2, will address Arab media discourse, the concept of resistance in Arab media and the role of media in distinguishing between terrorism and the right to resist occupation.

End of summary.

## 12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad sends a message on regional developments and bilateral relations to Vietnamese President and receives a message from President of Djibouti on bilateral relations and developments in the Horn of African" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/27)

"Mouallem receives calls from Zebari and Gul on preparations for the Iraq Neighboring Countries Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/27)

"Under the patronage of President Asad the 'International Conference on Arab-Islamic Media in Support of Palestinians' will be held in Damascus April 30-May 2" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/29)

"Over 500 rehabilitated residential housing units were handed over to Palestinian refugees in Khan Danno un Camp" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/29)

"Hailing the importance of the International Conference on Arab-Islamic Media in Support of Palestinians, Information Minister Bilal: Syria works to achieve just and comprehensive peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/28)

"The Lebanese unanimously condemn the crime which claimed the lives of two Lebanese youths. Former Lebanese Minister Wadi al-Khazen: Foreign intervention causes tampering with security" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/28)

"The EU keeps ban on the Palestinian government. Israeli occupation maneuvers in West Bank and attacks a demonstration in Bel'in" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/28)

"After the House of Representatives, the US Senate approves legislation linking funding of the war on Iraq to a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/27)

"Killing of 9 US soldiers within two days in Baghdad. Victims of the Baghdad and Karbala explosions exceed 200 casualties" (Government-owned Tisheen, 4/29)

"President Putin freezes Russia's participation in the conventional weapons treaty" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/27)

## 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Israel's Response to the Arab Peace Initiative"  
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Muhammad Ali Buza, an editorialist in government-owned al-Thawra,

wrote (4/27): "Israel is responding to the Arab peace initiative with political escalation in such a way as to renew its total refusal to withdraw to the June 4, 1967, line and to acknowledge the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to repatriation and the establishment of an independent state.... Israel persists in horrifying, besieging, and starving out masses of people in the occupied territories and in liquidating their leaders and cadres....

"This is a clear Israeli message to all Arabs and the parties concerned with the affairs of the region, saying that Israel will not accept peace unless it responds to its diktats and conditions, fulfills its Torah-based ambitions, and serves the interests of its strategic ally, the United States, which threw its full weight into the crisis and began managing, feeding, and escalating the conflict instead of helping ease and resolve it....

"Israel and the United States have no new position towards peace. Rather, they are engaged in further lies, charlatanism, maneuvers, and stalling for time in the hope of wresting gains that will legitimize their occupation, crimes, and evasion of a settlement....

"Arabs must not rely upon foreign powers to regain any Arab right.... Arabs are not the party that needs to give assurances and build confidence.... Duty dictates that no one in this nation should help this hostile alliance overcome its crises, offer gratuitous rewards to it, or cover up its measures, atrocities, and evasion of the requirements of a just and comprehensive peace."

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"The Veto and the Law of the Jungle"

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Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishrin, wrote (4/28): "President Bush is today preparing to use his veto to foil two bills endorsed by the House of Representatives and the Senate linking the funding of the war on Iraq to a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from the Iraqi quicksand....

"Through this position, Bush and his neoconservatives provide us with conclusive proof of the abuse of democracy in the United States and the ability of the American ruler to exercise dictatorship and erase a contrary opinion, even if this opinion is expressed by the parliamentary majority, which represents the popular majority....

"The Bush administration does not intend to take its hands off Iraq before it achieves its hostile objectives in the entire region, not only in that country....

"It is not strange for Bush to use the veto against the will of the American public. Nor are we surprised by anything that has happened to Iraq, from sanctions that were imposed on it before the aggressive war, to the serious conspiracy that is being implemented in the country today against the entire Arab nation to please Israel and implement the old Zionist plan in its new and modified American version, a version they are promoting to us under the broad headline 'New Middle East.'

"Perhaps the exercise of US dictatorship, which is wrapped in the cellophane of democracy, is not confined to domestic American affairs through the obstruction of Congressional resolutions or to attempts to export American democracy by force to other countries. It also affects international politics through the gate of the United Nations....

"The Bush administration today has two swords: a veto at home and a veto abroad. It is exercising the law of the jungle in broad daylight...."

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"The Wise Take the Chance"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin wrote (4/28):

"Russian President Putin's decision to freeze commitment to the conventional weapons treaty, in response to the planned American deployment of a missile system in Europe, is a reaffirmation that Russian policy has put its feet on solid ground, allowing Russia to regain its international status and role in decision-making in the face of a confused American policy exhausted and weakened by the Iraqi crisis....

"It is regrettable that Arabs have failed to reap the fruits of Washington's exhaustion in Iraq, as they have sought to help save the Bush administration from its predicament instead of taking advantage of its points of weakness."

Corbin